

Sunset Empire Transit begins using biodiesel

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If you have noticed something new and clean while riding the bus lately, we're here to report that it's not just a new tree shaped air freshener. Instead, Sunset Empire Transit has teamed up with Jackson & Sons Oil to run its busses on biodiesel.

One of many public transportation departments nationally to make the switch in recent years, Sunset Empire Transit began running a B5 mix of five percent biodiesel and 95 percent ultra low sulfur diesel in the beginning of December.

"We've been focusing on how to go green for a while now," said Roni Shaw, Operations Manager at Sunset Empire Transit. "After finding a local provider and learning that Cummings Manufacturing would still honor our vehicle warranties, we decided to start running biodiesel in our busses."

Biodiesel is a clean burning alternative fuel produced with natural, renewable sources through a process known as transesterification—reacting vegetable oils or animal fats to methanol and a catalyst. The result is a combustible fuel that is physically similar to petroleum diesel. This can then be run in a modified engine, or blended with petroleum diesel to run in any diesel engine.

Although many people initially notice the environmental benefits—less toxic, less combustible, and a more expedient biodegrading process—they tend to overlook its local economic benefits.

"All of our biodiesel comes from Sequential Biofuels' production facility in Salem, Ore.," said Larry Jackson, owner of Jackson & Sons Oil. "Beyond that, 85 percent of the natural product used to create it comes from Oregon grown canola or local restaurants' used cooking oil."

As for the price difference, biodiesel is currently around 8 cents more per gallon than regular diesel.

"As manufacturing of biodiesel increases, the price gap will shrink," said Jackson. "This will happen sooner rather than later as Sequential is currently expanding its production capacity from 1 million gallons a year to 5 million gallons."

Effects of running biodiesel in unmodified engines have been a concern for those tempted to make the switch. At higher blends, research has shown greater chances of piston clogging, a shorter shelf life, fewer miles per gallon, and less horsepower than petroleum based diesel.

"Initially we were carrying a B20 mix that generated some of these concerns," said Jackson. "We have since moved to a B5 mix that eliminates these possible pit falls while still cutting down on our foreign dependency of oil."

Considering that diesel is a self serve product in Oregon, those interested in using biodiesel can be issued a Pacific Pride card and fill up at any of its U.S. locations 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For more information, contact Jackson & Sons oil at (503) 738-5833.